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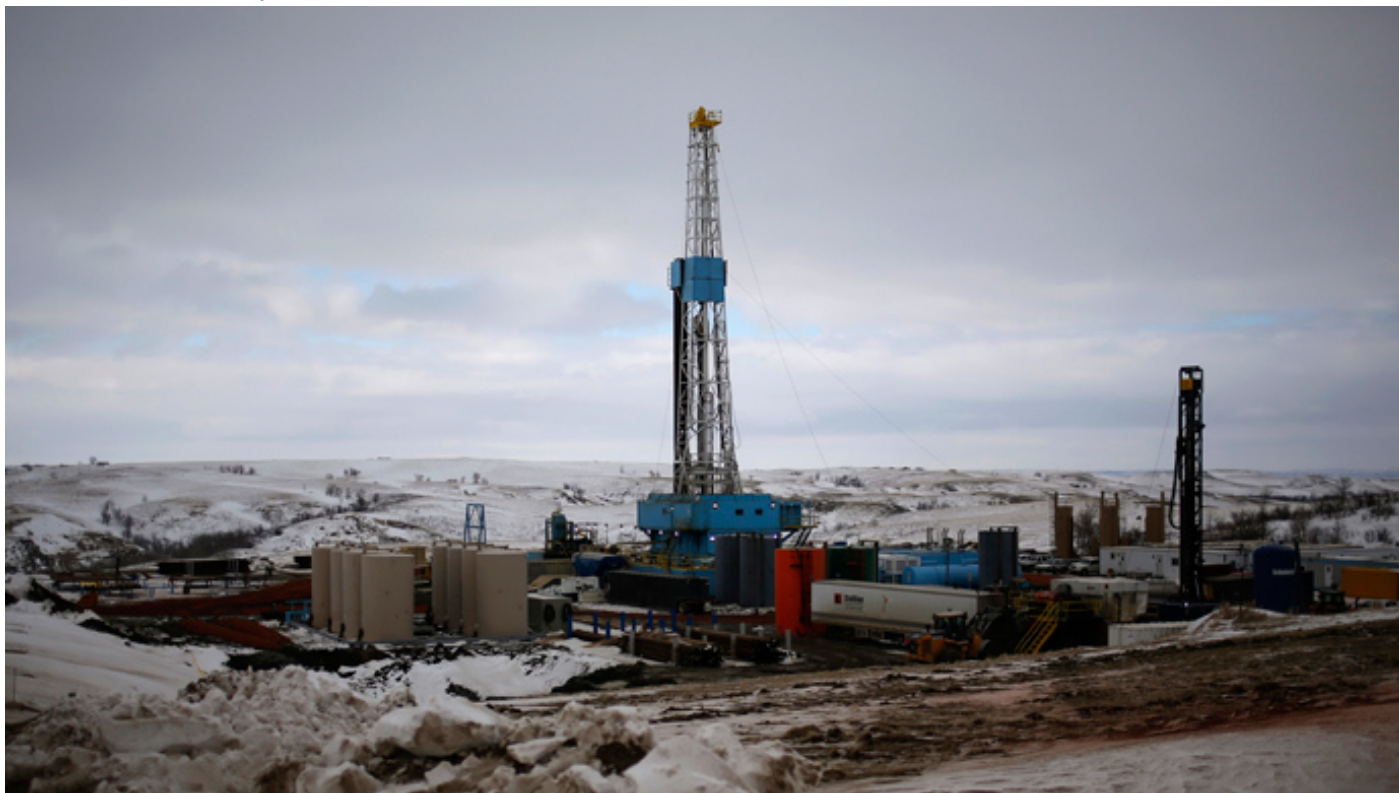
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Illegal dumping of fracking fluids in Texas highlights risk

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Reuters / Shannon Stapleton / Reuters

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Texas authorities are investigating the illegal dumping of toxic oil-and-gas-drilling waste fluids in Karnes County, Texas, ground zero for the hydraulic fracturing, or

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and often undisclosed chemicals, contaminants, oil, and metal shavings – was spilled over eight miles of a rural roadway in middle of the night last March, according to a Karnes County Sheriff's Department report obtained by [InsideClimate News](#).

The spill led to an investigation by the sheriff's department, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the state Railroad Commission, which regulates the oil and gas industry in Texas.

This kind of incident, increasingly common amid the domestic fracking bonanza, underscores the [risks](#) that come with an [unprecedented](#) grab for new forms of energy in Texas and other states in the US.

Karnes County is in the middle of one of the most active fracking and drilling areas in the nation, with nearly 9,000 sunken wells and another 5,500 approved since 2008. The US Environmental Protection Agency says drilling and fracking a single well in the Eagle Ford Shale region can take 4.9 million gallons of water.

The fracking process entails blasting fissures in rocks thousands of meters under the earth with water and sand to release trapped deposits of oil and gas.

Storage of this contaminated liquid is one of the many [problems associated with the human and environmental risks](#) fracking poses, as RT has reported on in the past.

Toxic wastewater is either injected into deep underground wells, disposed of in open pits for evaporation, sprayed into waste fields, or used over again. Injection wells used to dispose of fracking wastewater have contributed to [heightened](#) earthquake activity across the nation. Evaporation pits and waste fields are associated with *"noxious fumes and harmful airborne chemicals,"* according to InsideClimate News.

Oftentimes wastewater is stored wherever it is convenient and hidden, said Sharon Wilson, of Earthworks' Texas Oil and Gas Accountability Project.

"There is so much of this that they don't know what to do with it," she told InsideClimate News. *"So it's not surprising that there are cases where it's just dumped anywhere."*

The culprit

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companies were hauling wastewater from three oil and gas wells being drilled by Marathon Oil Corp, a major player in energy development around the Eagle Ford Shale that controls 211,000 acres in the region.

Investigators narrowed the culprit to On Point Services. The company's truck was carrying 20 to 30 barrels – or 840 to 1,269 gallons – of contaminated drilling fluid at the time of the spill, according to the sheriff's report. The truck was empty upon arrival at the facility where truck tanks are scrubbed, according to records.

The truck's driver said the tanker's valve leaked, at times, and that he couldn't remember if he had checked the valve during the shipment, the report said. The sheriff's department could not tell if the dumping was intentional or not.

On Point's owner, Winfred Stanfield, denied his company was at fault when contacted by investigators. He told InsideClimate News in an interview that five other companies had been "*implicated*" in the incident, though he did not clarify his remarks.

"I don't want to touch this story at all," Stanfield said before cutting off the interview, InsideClimate News reported.

When shown video evidence of the truck scattering fluid, as well as the driver's admission and documents proving his company's truck was on Farm-to-Market Road 81 at the time, Stanfield told sheriff's investigators that his driver was incompetent and to blame for the incident.

Yet no charges in the case have been filed, as TCEQ and the Railroad Commission continue their respective investigations of the incident.

"If I could I would file criminal charges on him," according to the 10-page report prepared by Robert Ebrom Jr., the Karnes County chief deputy and one case detective.

Karnes County Sheriff Dwayne Villanueva declined comment to InsideClimate News based on the ongoing state probes.

TCEQ would not comment based on its ongoing investigation.

Railroad Commission spokeswoman Michelle Banks said the agency is reviewing the incident to determine what actions are necessary.

InsideClimate News noted another recent spill incident in nearby Wilson County.

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